

# Poetry as a Tool of Instruction: A Study of John Milton's Paradise Lost and Bammara Pothana's Bhagavat

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**Abstract:** Poetry, irrespective of its language, culture, land, is basically Philosophy which introduces us early to life and gives us the pleasurable instruction in reference to character, emotion and action. The excellence of a poet is bound up with that of a human being. The two poets taken for study namely John Milton from English literature and Bammara Pothana from Sanskrit literature belong to two different cultures, languages and regions. But their works of art, grand Epics, "Paradise Lost" and "Bhagavat" respectively represent the kindred throb of the human heart which because human is neither Indian nor European. Milton's Paradise Lost has the loftiest theme, "to assert external providence and justify the ways of god to men. The Epic Bhagavat depicts the earnestness of King Parikshit to attain Moksha in seven days since he is aware of his own destined day. Purity of mind and concentration are the prime qualities of a Yoga or seeker of God. God is Omniscient, Omnipotent and Omnipresent as is viewed by both Milton and Pothana. A deeper study of these two Epics would be beneficial to the present society in reinforcing the moral values which are steeply decreasing. The younger generation in the East and the West due to the impact of films and television develop negative attitude towards life resulting in the attempts of suicides and they are standing directionless. The study helps mankind to develop an ideal and positive attitude towards life. In this materialistic World, a spiritual bent of mind is essential to face the challenges of life.

**Keywords:** Poetry, Philosophy, Code of Conduct, Purpose of Life, Reinforcement of moral values in both The Epics.

Meena Alexander referring to Shelley's essay 'A Defence of poetry' says "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world". Alexander further says "the poem is an invention that exists in spite of history... In a time of violence the task of poetry is in some way to reconcile us to our world and to allow us a measure of tenderness and grace with which to exist... Poetry's task is to reconcile us to the world but not to accept it at face value or to assent to things that are wrong but to reconcile one in a larger sense, to return us in love, the province of the imagination, to the scope of our mortal life.

Some poets interpret poetry "what is deeply felt is essentially unsayable". Poetry is indeed something divine. It is at once the centre and the circumference of knowledge; It is something which comprehends all science, and to which all science must be referred. It is at the same time the root and blossom of all thoughts; it is that from which all spring, and that which adorns all". "Poetry is a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity" says Wordsworth. E.E. Cummings says, "well, write poetry, for God's sake, it is the only thing that matters In spite of the above definitions, Poetry, irrespective of its language, culture, land, is basically Philosophy which introduces us early to life and gives us the pleasurable instruction in reference to character, emotion and action. The excellence of a poet is bound up with that of a human being. The two poets taken for study namely John Milton from English literature and Bammara Pothana from Sanskrit literature belong to two different cultures, languages and regions. But their works of art, grand Epics, "Paradise Lost" and "Bhagavat" respectively represent the kindred throb of the human heart which because human is neither Indian nor European.

There is a colourful harmony between God and man in Indian thought, while the opposition between the two is marked in the west. The naïve utterances of the Vedic Poets, the wondrous suggestiveness of the Upanishads, the marvellous psychological analyses of the Buddhists and the very surprising system of Shankara are quite interesting and instructive from the cultural point of views. Homer was thought of as the greatest teacher who laid down all the rules needed for the conduct of life and in him were hidden all lessons of Philosophy. Aristotle has already insisted that the poetical truth and scientific truths are not identical, poetry is related to morality. Plato's criticism of poetry is chiefly from the moral point of view. According to Aristotle, the characters portrayed in epic and tragic poetry have their basis in moral goodness; but the goodness is of heroic order. The grandeur is moral grandeur, in the words of Cedroe C. Borwn, "No author of a great Epic poem communicated in so many obviously instructional ways with his readers through the narrative voice as did Milton in "Paradise Lost"<sup>1</sup> John Milton chose to glorify the Divine Spirit, essentially unknowingly of whom we are all parts and a moral fall, which takes place in every man and from which everyman can rise by his strength, which is the Divine Spirit in him. Milton's Paradise Lost has the loftiest theme, "to assert external providence and justify the ways of god to men. "Christ is, in truth, Reason triumphing over desire. Milton has a clear and precise vision apart from being in perfect command over his ideas and art. Behind the latter there is the intensity of conviction and depth of ideas. Thus Christ is Reason: he is truly the reasonable part of each believer, each man being part of god. Then is allegory in it, along with myth and symbolism. From the eighteenth to nineteenth century, transition is clearly marked by an increased emphasis on spiritual values, which is clearly

reflected in Milton's Paradise Lost. His poetry becomes a sublime embodiment of will and passion. Milton throughout his life was "a humanist" in his method and his aim. These conceptions are found in Milton, the man, the Philosopher and the artist. David Lowenstein fees, "sublime protestant Epic of its age, Paradise Lost fully rivals and supersedes its classical and European precursors-a poem written by a poet inwardly illuminated by the spirit of the Bible and the light of God"<sup>2</sup>

Bammera Pothana of the well-known epic poem was not only a poet but also a true Philosopher and an ardent devotee of the Lord and Almighty like John Milton. Strict discipline and literary scholarship go together in the life of Pothana. He imbibed true values of Philosophy enunciated by Veda Vyasa in his Sanskrit epic Bhagavat. Philosophy or "adhyatma" (Adhi+Atma) is to know one's own self. Man must crave for the upliftment of his self from a lower to higher level. In "Bhagavat" it is emphasized that no man is a born Saint and that the birth is not the only deciding factor of one's elevation to sublimity.

Patanjali was the ancient philosopher who preached Yoga. The mental body must be purified and strengthened by study and by acquiring knowledge. The spiritual body is to be developed by complete devotion to God. Austerities, study and resignation to the will of God facilitate man to get rid of the afflictions, intellectual and emotional to which all human beings are liable. These afflictions are the root cause of birth, suffering and rebirth. The pleasure and pain that man suffers are the result of his past deeds (Prarabdha Karma). All sensations and senses are related to the three Gunas(attributes) namely Satva, Raja and Tamas.

The existence of God who is not visible has a scientific basis in "Darsanas" in "Tarka Sangraham". It is felt and proved by scholars with rational thinking. The primary qualities that reflect in "Bhagavat" are devotion supported by scientific reasoning and Yoga. Atma, as defined in 62<sup>nd</sup> sloka of SankhyaKarikalu.

*"Tasman Na Badhyate Na Muchyate NapiSamsaratiKaschit  
SamsaratiBadhyate Muchyate Cha NanshrayaPrakruthi"*

Is neither chained by anything nor attains "Moksha" nor invoices in the cycle of birth and death. Prakruti (or nature) invoices itself in the birth and death and turns into the formation of "Bhyoga" and "Bhoga" and attains "Moksha" by getting liberated. What is established by Sankhya Yoga is seconded by "Bhagavat Geeta". "Bhagavat Geeta" and "Bhagavat" are propounding the theory of Sankhya besides accepting God.

*"NainamChindanthiShasthraniNainamDahatiPavakaha:  
NachainamKeedayanthyaSonaSoshayati Maruthaha:"<sup>4</sup>*

*"Kala lonaJeevundukowtuhalambunaPekkuDehambula  
Peru Vadasi  
IndriyambulaventaYellaVruttambuluveekshimchi Mari  
TannueruguKarani  
AkhilantaratomakudaguParameshwarudakhilaJantulaHruday  
amulanundi*

*BudhiVruthulaNellaBodhayyaiVeekshinchuBandabadduduK  
aduPrabhavamuna"*

God who is present in every object does not get attached to it but witnesses the acts done by the animal as well as human being.

*"ViswananthayuhariMayamu, HariViswamayundu  
HarimayamukaniDravyam, ParamanuvuLedu."*

..... from Bhagavat

It means "Universe is Lord; Lord is Universe.  
Without Lord, wealth or atom is nothing"

As one can't see one's own eye, we cannot see God who is present in our own self. To realize God in us, we have to see inward (Atmavalokanam) and feel God's presence in our own selves.

To those who do not believe in the existence of God, scientific truths are focused in "Bhagavat" with rational thinking. This Epic not only describes God's presence but also satisfies the inquisitiveness of the seeker of truthfulness. Alastair Fowler talks of Paradise Lost, "Milton's World is astonishing, almost sciencefictional construction, based on extrapolation of one great premise, unfallen nature – a presupposition worked out in every particular, from the psychological and zoological to the astronomical and gastronomical"<sup>3</sup> Because of its coverage of various aspects of life, it belongs both to its own time and to subsequent tradition. The moral issues of his poem remain live enough in our own time.

The Epic Bhagavat depicts the earnestness of King Parikshit to attain Moksha in seven days since he is aware of his own destined day. Purity of mind and concentration are the prime qualities of a Yoga or seeker of God. God is Omniscient, Omnipotent and Omnipresent as is viewed by both Milton and Pothana.

The objective of my paper is to relate the relevance of these two Epics, "Paradise Lost" and "Bhagavat" to the present day society. In the background of increasing terrorism, fanaticism and globalization, a drastic deterioration is taking place in the value systems where humanity and morality is hardly present and the revival of the ancient value system is an urgent and current need of the hour".

A cursory glance of both "Bhagavat" and "Paradise Lost" shows the oneness of God, especially with the compassionate Jesus Christ and Lord Krishna whose incarnations in this world redeem mankind from all kinds of bonds and surely guide him towards salvation.

A deeper study of these two Epics would be beneficial to the present society in reinforcing the moral values which are steeply decreasing. The younger generation in the East and the West due to the impact of films and television develop negative attitude towards life resulting in the attempts of suicides and they are standing directionless. Disintegration of joint families is another reason as the children are not moulded into good citizens by their grandparents who stand for moral values. Through story-telling, grandparents used to

spend lot of time with their grandchildren inculcating in them the qualities of patience, love, perseverance, commitment, dedication to duty, and Humaneness. Besides these values, the knowledge of the creation of the Universe, elements of nature create a scientific awareness in the individual.

I feel my study would make readers think of the instructive power and the philosophy packed in the poetry and surely would give them the various aspects of human conduct in life. The study helps mankind to develop an ideal and positive attitude towards life. In this materialistic World, a spiritual bent of mind is essential to face the challenges of life. In my view it is possible through such a study as these classics are not a prescribed study to a larger number of students in their academics. This paper reveals the purpose of life and enlightens about the miraculous power of poetry and reiterates the role of poetry in our lives.

## References

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